

New youth mental health centre planned for Fort McMurray

[Dennis Kovtun](#) · CBC News · July 5



Wood Buffalo councillors approved the zoning for a new youth mental health facility unanimously last week. (Dennis Kovtun/CBC)

A youth mental health facility planned for construction in Fort McMurray hopes to provide services that many families in the community are currently forced to travel hundreds of kilometres to access.

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo councillors unanimously approved zoning for a new youth mental health facility in Fort McMurray's Gateway district last week.

It will be operated by CASA Mental Health, a non-profit organization headquartered in Edmonton.

"I think it's a great program," said Wood Buffalo's mayor Sandy Bowman.

Other council members said the facility is sorely needed.

"I've had a first-hand experience of a very close and dear young guy that had this challenge," said Coun. Funky Banjoko, "And I can attest to the fact that the family was tired of travelling to Edmonton to attend to him."

The centre is planned to open in the fall of 2027, and will provide mental health services for youth aged 12 to 18.

The new facility will include a day program for structured outpatient care, as well as a live-in treatment option. Once completed, it will have about 20 beds.

Tiffany Bennett, whose 10-year-old son has complex mental health needs, told CBC this will be the first facility in Fort McMurray that will offer all, or at least most, of the services her son requires in one place.

"A lot of times you're being sent to Edmonton because there isn't enough support here and then you're stuck struggling on like a two-year waiting list, sometimes even longer, depending on what your child needs," she said.

"And this kind of opens up that barrier for us to be able to have an intervention here locally."

She said the facility should reduce the need to travel to Edmonton for services.

Facility likely to be in high demand

Bennett is concerned that the facility might not be able to handle the demand.

"With the overall growing population and with the high demand here in Fort McMurray, it's great they're going to be building that, but they may need more," she said. "And then, hopefully, they're open to expanding it based on what the community needs."

Paula Colvin, director at CASA Mental Health, said they are aware of the demand the new facility will be facing.

"I have no doubt we will face that," she said.

"We have definitely made a decision that we're going to make sure we deliver the quality that these kids need. The quantity, we will manage the best we can," she said.

"We know the need is high. We know that we can open our doors and deliver quality care to that many kids," Colvin said.

Colvin said they may be able to open up more spots in the future.

"As we grow, and we hope community will see the value, then we'll be able to continue to fundraise and be able to support further spots for kids."

